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SUBJECT: Nomination for Woman of Courage Award - Nebahat Akkoc,
President and founder of KA-MER, Turkey

REF: STATE 012871

¶1. (U) The following is Mission Turkey's nomination for the Secretary's "Woman of Courage" awards.

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¶2. (U) Nominee: Nebahat Akkoc, President and founder of KA-MER (Women's Center), Turkey. Age: 54. Contact addresses: Ali Emiri 4. Sk. Diskale Apt No:2/4 Yenisehir, Diyarbakir, Turkey; nebahatakkoc@superonline.com.

¶3. (U) Justification: Nebahat Akkoc founded KA-MER in 1997 to promote women's rights and fight against domestic violence. She herself had been a victim of domestic violence and was determined to help others, despite the significant cultural and social obstacles. Against overwhelming odds, she founded KA-MER in Diyarbakir, in the heart of Turkey's southeast, at a time when that area of the country was extremely tense, with an enormous security presence, as the military continued its then 10-year old campaign to combat the terrorist PKK organization. It was also a period of great influx into the cities by villagers displaced by the fighting, straining municipalities' already stretched ability to deliver services and provide housing.

¶4. (U) The region of Turkey in which KA-MER works remains today a challenging environment, where strong traditional and tribal values often collide with urban morals, families remain large and unemployment is high. Then as now, many women in Turkey's southeast face severe discrimination and repression, with few places to turn to for shelter or assistance.

¶5. (U) KA-MER has been particularly active in responding to the problem of "honor" killings, a regular occurrence in southeastern Turkey, where many people still regard acts of adultery or "promiscuous" behavior by young women as violations of family honor and believe that such transgressions justify attacks on or even murder of the accused women. In many cases, women facing the prospect of such punishment commit suicide or their murders are passed off as suicides. According to media reports, the number of such deaths may be as high as 300 per year in Turkey.

¶6. (U) Although KA-MER faces enormous social barriers, in less than ten years it has helped change the actions and attitude of the Turkish government, including law enforcement authorities. KA-MER approaches the issue on several levels. First, it provides shelter, mediation and - in extremis, relocation - services to women who are victims of domestic abuse or who fear they will be targeted. KA-MER's interventions have saved the lives of dozens of women in southeastern Turkey. Secondly, KA-MER seeks to change the social context by raising women's awareness of their legal rights and providing business@ose who wish to become et. Thirdly, KA-MER is worvp s when incidents oc#g these networks that make headway against "onor" killings. Finally, at the national levQl KA-MER has been instrumental in providing advQce to policy makers grappling with the issue of "honor" killings and domestic violence. This behind-the-scenes work resulted in a 2006 directive from the Prime Minister's office instructing regional and

local officials in how to prevent such crimes.

17. (U) Akkoc continues to lead the Diyarbakir office of KA-MER, which now has branches in 11 other cities in southeastern Turkey. Akkoc's efforts exemplify how a single individual's belief in fundamental human rights can produce profound societal changes: in this case, scores of young women are alive today due to her efforts and hundreds more have a new-found awareness of their rights and a corresponding conviction that they are capable of charting their own future. She was recognized as a "European Hero" in Time Magazine-Europe in 2003 and received the Ginetta Sagan Award from Amnesty International in 2004.

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